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NOAA RECEIVES NEW FISHERIES SURVEY VESSEL

Advanced Capabilities Provide Unique Fisheries Research Platform

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration took delivery today of the first of a series of fisheries survey vessels from VT Halter Marine Inc., a subsidiary of Vision Technologies Systems Inc., in Pascagoula, Miss. This is NOAA's first newly constructed fisheries survey vessel in more than 25 years. The ship is named for the late Alaskan fishing industry leader Oscar Dyson, whose numerous private and public contributions improved the industry for many Alaskans who make their living at sea. NOAA is an agency of the U.S. Department of Commerce.

"*Oscar Dyson* will have a huge impact in managing our nation's valuable marine resources so that we can maintain a robust fishing industry and sustain healthy fish populations," said retired Vice Admiral Conrad C. Lautenbacher Jr., under secretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere and NOAA administrator. "The ship's unique attributes set it apart from its predecessors and put NOAA on the world stage of fisheries research. Because of its advanced sensing capabilities, it is the newest link in the developing Global Earth Observing System of Systems."

Oscar Dyson is the first of four planned 208-foot fisheries survey ships to be delivered by VT Halter Marine, with the second ship, *Henry B. Bigelow*, currently under construction. This series of ships will greatly expand the capabilities of the existing NOAA fleet by meeting specific data collection requirements of NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service, as well as providing a cutting-edge, low acoustic signature. *Oscar Dyson* and its sister ships will have the ability to perform hydro-acoustic surveys of fish. They will also be able to conduct bottom and mid-water trawls while running physical and biological-oceanographic sampling during a single deployment--a combined capability unavailable in the private sector.

"Delivery of this new ship is an exciting milestone for NOAA and NOAA Fisheries scientists, who will now have access to a world-class platform," said Bill Hogarth, assistant administrator for NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service. "This state-of-the-art, acoustically quiet vessel will give NOAA scientists access to advanced technologies to better understand the state of the nation's fisheries. The fishing industry is a large portion of the nation's economy, and the work we do ensures the sustainable use of our ocean resources. That means providing jobs, safe and healthy seafood for consumers, and quality recreational opportunities for the American public."

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"The advanced capabilities of *Oscar Dyson* will enable NOAA to conduct its fisheries research and assessment mission in Alaska with much greater accuracy and cost efficiency," said Rear Admiral Samuel P. De Bow Jr., NOAA, director of the NOAA Commissioned Corps and NOAA Marine and Aviation Operations, which operates and manages the NOAA fleet. "Delivery of the ship is a significant step in the modernization of NOAA's research and survey fleet."

Oscar Dyson will depart Pascagoula in late January or early February, with a crossing through the Panama Canal scheduled in February. A several-week stopover is planned in the Pacific Northwest for post-delivery shakedown cruises and outfitting. The ship will then sail for its homeport of Kodiak, Alaska, in the spring to begin operations. Its primary mission will be to monitor the Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska fisheries, particularly Alaskan pollock, the nation's largest single fishery and the fourth largest in value. Current plans call for *Oscar Dyson* to be commissioned in Kodiak during the late spring or early summer.

"We at VT Halter Marine are proud to have completed and delivered one of the most technologically advanced fisheries science vessels in the world," said Boyd King, chief executive officer of VT Halter Marine. "It is exciting for the men and women of VT Halter Marine to be building the ships critical to this vital mission of monitoring and protecting our nation's fisheries."

The ship is under the command and management of commissioned officers of the NOAA Corps. The NOAA Corps is one of the nation's seven uniformed services, and, as part of NOAA, is under the U.S. Department of Commerce. The Corps is composed of officers – all scientists or engineers – who provide NOAA with an important blend of operational, management and technical skills that support the agency's environmental programs at sea, in the air, and ashore. Cmdr. Frank Wood, NOAA, is the commanding officer of *Oscar Dyson*. Lt. Todd Bridgeman, NOAA, is the executive officer of the ship; Lt. Arthur Stark, NOAA, is the operations officer and Ens. Paul Kunicki, NOAA, is the navigation officer. The officers are shepherding the ship through its shakedown and outfitting prior to its becoming operational in the spring.

The ship's civilian crew includes highly skilled wage mariners. Gene Arnold is the chief marine engineer; Gary McNally is the chief bosun; and Paul Loy, Steve Miller and Steve Macri are the rotating electronics technicians.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources.

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